

["Red Bank"]

26009 Life History - [For - ?] - Mrs. Ellington - Miss Shepherd

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Mrs. T. H. Ellington

"Red Bank"

1230 Greenridge Road

South Jacksonville,

Florida.

Personal Interview

Rose Shepherd, Writer.

"RED BANK"

HISTORIC DUVAL COUNTY HOME

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On the last street within the corporate limits of South Jacksonville stands "Red Bank" — an old plantation manor house formerly centering a land grant with a seven-mile frontage on the St. Johns River and a history of continuous ownership of over one hundred years by the Phillips family, long identified with Duval County history and civic affairs.

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The demand for estates with homes along the river, resulted in sales of parcels of land comprising the old grant from time to time, and finally an enterprising real estate company secured title to a large acreage nearest the city limits, developing it as a high class residential section under the name of "Colonial Manor" — a gesture of recognition of the importance of the old house in the picture.

Profiting by the experience acquired in marketing another development on the south side, the real estate company brought in dredging machinery, sand and silt was pumped up from the river bed, and the property line frontage was extended some hundred or more feet. So "Red Bank" which, in the early days, was only a stone's throw from the mighty St. Johns, is now six blocks from the river bank.

2

"Colonial Manor" was popular from the beginning with those wishing to establish themselves as far as possible from the "[madding?] crowd" and yet secure the city facilities of running water, electric light, and convenient access to local schools. A distance which in the old days was a three-hour journey from Jacksonville is now covered by bus or auto in twenty minutes.

New homes sprang up throughout the section, but nobody wanted the old house, until Mrs. T. H. Ellington three years ago realized its possibilities. Having spent her childhood in just such a home on a plantation near Dalton, Georgia, she longed to again live in a house with twelve foot ceilings, deep fireplaces, and spacious rooms, so the purchase was made, the deed recorded, and restoration commenced.

The old house has not had its "face lifted." However, the modern platting of lots and streets [necessitated?] making the west side the front entrance, with the number 1230 Greenridge Road. There is a new door with an old fashioned brass knocker, and new [sash?] in the twelve-light windows which "four-square" the front, with narrow green shutters framing the sides.

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A double track cement driveway leads to the east entrance and on into a two-car garage. This was formerly the front of the house which faced the sand trail of the private lane leading through the plantation from the main country road. Remnants of the old hitching post remained here until a few years ago, and weathered old liveoaks in the yard could tell many interesting tales of the plantation owners, their families³ and distinguished guests who in early days passed through this wide colonial door with its framing of small sections of glass to admit light into the spacious hall which marked the entrance to this hospitable southern home.

“Judge [H.?] B. Phillips' /grand- father was the owner of the original grant,” said Mrs. Ellington, “which he received direct from the Spanish King in recognition of some meritorious service to the Crown, as was then the custom. He was a retired sea captain from Red Bank, New Jersey, hence he named his new possession “Red Bank” which designation continues to the present day. Judge Phillips' widow in Large Place has the original deed to the land, written entirely in Spanish.

“The place was in such a wilderness, with the country then roamed far and wide by Indians, that Captain Phillips was not much interested in his new property, and he never lived here. However, his son, who was Judge Phillips' father came down, and when he saw the place so beautifully located along the mighty St. Johns River, he built a log cabin right on the crest of the hill here, where he lived for some years. He acquired a large number of slaves, valued at \$100,000, so I have been told. Large sections of the land were cleared and planted in cotton, sugarcane, corn, peas, and garden crops.

“This house was built in 1864 with bricks molded by hand from clay obtained right on the plantation and burned in large kilns by the slaves at such seasons as they were not busy with farming. I am told it required two years to complete the work.

“Judge Phillips was born about two years or more after the house was built. 4 “The slave quarters were back of the house to the south. The kitchen was a frame building with a

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severed way leading to the dining room on the southeast — the room we now use for a breakfast room. The stables were down near the river, the sheds, blacksmith shop, the carpenter shop, coming up to meet the slave quarters in a semi-circle.

“The house is built on heavy hand-hewn timbers. The house conforms to the ‘four-pen’ style of interior with a large hall each way and openings opposite on all sides to give cross ventilation. Each room contained a fireplace. The four rooms on the lower floor and the corresponding four above are each twenty feet square. The floors throughout are the original hard wood, well seasoned and tempered, and highly polished from long use. The walls are sixteen inches thick, both the outside and the partitions.

“When we took over the property and put in electric wiring and modern plumbing, it was quite a task for the mechanics to cut through the heavy walls — in fact, they just had to use pick-axes to make the proper openings.

“The oil furnaces was installed to good advantage in the former dining-room, taking up about a fourth of the space, but in running the pipes to different parts of the building, we had to use the former room-closets, as the partitions were of solid masonry and could not be utilized for this purpose.

“After the war, when the slaves were free, the Phillips' found it difficult to operate the large plantation, and 5 large portions of the land were sold. Prof. Palmer, who was superintendent of Public Instruction for Duval County, acquired the home place, and lived here with his lively family of boys and girls for many years.

“Elizabeth Palmer (Mrs. O. S. Tyler) had told me that when they lived in this house, they used to hunt alligators in the swamps between here and town. Drains have /now been put in by the real estate company and the lowest part developed as a beauty spot in the form of a large lake. She said they would blind the alligators by dazzling lights, and then they

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would be killed or captured. The negroes ate certain parts of the alligator meat, and they could always find ready sale for the hides after they were properly taken care of.

“There was no road to San Jose, as is now, between here and the river. The main road came over Hendricks Avenue from the ferry, and the private lane to the house here led off from this road, and came past the house between the two big liveoaks to the east.

“On account of its [spaciousness?], the old house was always famous as a gathering place for social affairs, particularly dances. But it was such a journey to get here, that when there were evening parties and dances, the guests had to be accommodated over night. This was no trouble, however, the rooms were so big — extra beds were set up, and the girls were taken care of in one wing of the house, the boys in the other.

“In its hayday there were many different kinds of fruit raised on the place, but the only reminders now are two 6 scrubby plum trees in the side yard and a few of the old orange trees in the back. There is also a crepe myrtle tree in the south yard, and the stump of a very large one where the tree was cut down nearby to make room for a new house.

“All of the old gardens and flowers have long since disappeared. Mrs. Tyler has cuttings from some of the old rosebushes and I am in hopes of getting some of these to bring back and start growing again in the home of their ancestors.”

A trip of inspection through the house [disclosed?] the painstaking care with which Mr. and Mrs. Ellington have modernized the interior, but retained the old outlines.

The color scheme of the breakfast room — the formal dining room of the old home — is buff and Chinese red; the linoleum floor covering a combination of these two colors, the curtains of buff, the breakfast set the same shade, and all chairs with cushions and back covers of buff and red with a tracery of green. The wide windows with their [sills?] sixteen inches deep permitted the light from the east and south to enter, making the room cheerful indeed. Even the oil heating furnace in the southwest corner of the room did not seem out

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of place. "A separate room could have been built for the furnace, but we decided to put it right in the breakfast room, and get the benefit of all the heat." said Mrs. Ellington.

The pantry space and the voluminous closets for dishes and linen had been retained. A short passage leads to the dining room on the west half of the house. From here the 7 vista is breath-taking. The stairway, which formerly went up from the east or front entrance, has been changed to the center of the house, a wall has been removed and a wide arch installed between the entrance hall and living room, throwing the whole half of the west side of the house into one long room approximately thirty by sixty feet. Thick matching Burgundy broadloom rugs covered the three floor spaces, rich draperies in Burgundy covered the long windows, and throughout with excellent taste were distributed the plantation heirlooms of furniture, inherited by Mrs. Ellington upon the death of her mother two years ago at the age of ninety years. — In the center a priceless hand-rubbed mahogany dining table covered with a hand-made Chinese lace cover — there against the wall a drop-leaf table a hundred and fifty years old — an Italian hand-carved bookcase, comfortable old chairs, with several of modern type — all completely blending into a harmonious whole. In the dining room and living room the old fireplaces had been retained, but were not in use, as the modern heating system distributes the heat evenly and comfortably.

From the dining room through French doors to the west is a tiled-floor, glassed-in sun parlor, formerly used by Mrs. Ellington for her kindergarten class, with floor-to-ceiling closets for storing away the equipment used in this work in which she has gained wide reputation. A system of card [indices?] with 'case histories' of her little pupils and their reactions to child study has been featured in magazine articles and school [journals?], and Mrs. Ellington 8 has been asked by Peabody's College, to compile these 'case histories' into a booklet, with some of the simple characterizing stories she was accustomed to tell her little charges, so that it may be distributed to mothers and child-training agencies as a new aid in kindergarten work.

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The library opens to the east of the living room, and has access from the music room, the hall, and the breakfast room. This is another of the large twenty by twenty foot rooms, having a cozy fireplace, and with carefully planned window arrangement, and lined with shelves from floor to ceiling, filled with carefully selected books, is very attractive.

A small bathroom has been cut from the southeast corner of the library.

The second floor arrangement is very simple, containing four large bedrooms. A wide hall goes through the center from east to west, a wide window in the east, and a large door in the west opening onto the sun parlor below. Here, too, a tiled bathroom has been constructed in space taken from the northeast bedroom, occupied by the two sons of the family. The rooms are simply furnished, with many of the old pieces of furniture, and pictures and photographs of long ago.

Mrs. Ellington is quite a talented artist, and throughout the house are many well chosen flower pictures and other well executed subjects, adding culture and color to the old interior.